

# Syllables and Syllabification

## What is a Syllable?

A syllable is a unit of pronunciation that contains a vowel, with or without adjoining consonants. For the purposes of syllables, the letter 'y' is considered a vowel when it makes the phoneme of a (long or short) vowel, e.g., in mystery but not in yoghurt.

The number of vowel phonemes is equal to the number of syllables in a word.

## How To Count Syllables

Here are some methods for counting syllables:



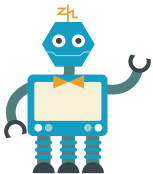
### Listen for the vowel phonemes

One syllable for every vowel phoneme you hear.



### Put your hand under your chin and say the word

The number of times your chin touches your hand is the number of syllables.



### Speak like a robot

The pauses you make in the word are the syllable breaks.



### Hum the word

Count how many times you hum.



### Physical activities like clapping or jumping on each syllable break

The number of claps is the number of syllables.

1  
2  
3

### Precision counting

Count the number of vowels in the word; add one every time a 'y' makes a vowel phoneme; subtract one for each digraph/trigraph with more than one vowel in it; add one if the word ends in 'le' or 'les' and the letter before the 'l' is not a vowel – the final number you get is the number of syllables.

## Rules of Syllabification

1. Separate compound words or affixes from the base or root word

foot|ball      bound|ing      un|help|ful

2. Two or more consonants next to each other in a word with more than one syllable:

a) Divide between them when they make two separate phonemes or when they are homogenous digraphs (double letters)

ob|ject      of|fice      hap|py

b) Keep them together when they are a digraph containing two different letters

chick|en      graph|eme      meth|od

3. The consonant is surrounded by vowels:

a) If the first vowel has a long phoneme, divide before the consonant

re|sist      ba|by      a|corn

b) If the first vowel has a short phoneme, divide after the consonant

cab|in      lim|it      sol|id

4. The word ends in consonant then 'le' or 'les':

a) If the consonants before the 'le' are 'ck', divide right before the 'le'

freck|les      pick|le      buck|le

b) If the letter before the 'le' is a consonant other than 'ck' divide it before that consonant

spar|kle      peo|ple      tur|tle

## Notes on Syllabification Rules

1. Syllabification is highly dependent upon your pronunciation. If you have the same number of syllables, but identified the syllable break in a different place, that is fine. There are websites to show you syllable breaks if you need an overriding consensus.
2. In Phonics, we tend to keep the homogenous digraphs (double letters) together. This is slightly different in syllabification rules and the children will begin to learn the difference between breaking the word up for syllables or phonemes. You can keep the homogenous digraphs together if you wish.
3. You may pronounce words with elision in natural pronunciation, which skips out a syllable, for example, in restaurant, you might just say 'rest-ront'. Even when we don't pronounce them all, those syllables are still there so we still count the word restaurant as having three syllables. You might want to use a 'spelling voice' to pronounce all the syllables just to help you spell it.

## Syllable Types

There are six syllable types in English:

1. **Open syllables** have one long vowel phoneme which is the last letter of the syllable. These have only one consonant between it and the next vowel.
2. **Closed syllables** have only one short vowel phoneme and end in a consonant.
3. **'R' controlled syllables** contain an 'r' in the syllable that changes the pronunciation of the vowel, e.g., in the digraphs 'ar', 'or' and 'er'.
4. **Vowel digraph, trigraph and tetragraph syllables** contain a digraph, trigraph or tetragraph that makes a long or short vowel phoneme, e.g., 'ou', 'igh' and 'ough'.
5. **Split digraph syllables** contain a split digraph e.g. i\_e and is usually the last syllable in a word.
6. **Consonant -le syllables** contain a consonant before the 'le' and is usually the last syllable in a word. It can sometimes have the plural marker 's' on too.